

# NEITHER LEGS NOR BACKS IN JAPANESE FOLLIES

By CLARE OUSLEY



## East Is East—

TOKIO.

AS I REMEMBER, back in the days when I lived in New York (almost a year ago now), after the theatrical season was well under way, one of the first questions with which you greeted a friend was, "Have you seen the Follies yet?" If the friend had not you spent the evening describing the show. If he had, the hours between dinner and midnight were given over to an animated discussion of the merits of this year's performance as compared to those of other years. Were the girls as pretty? Were the scenic effects as spectacular? Were the costumes as daring? And, anyway, after all was said and done, there never could be another Follies like the one of 1916 or 1917 or 1918, as the case might be.

Japan has its Follies, too. A little different, to be sure, and perhaps to a New York audience lacking in the necessary pep. Not so many or so much leg as a New York audience might require—no revealingly diaphanous draperies, but a Follies nevertheless which has pleased the first-nighters of Japan, and particularly of Kyoto, for over fifty years, which I suspect is more of a record than Mr. Ziegfeld can claim, and a Follies which, like Ziegfeld's own, has its regular clientele of Tired Business Men and its host of imitators.

During the days of the Tokugawa Shogunate a training school for geisha or dancing girls, known as the Gion-Shinchi, was established in Kyoto. Here the intricacies and subtleties of the geisha dances were then, and are still, a half century later, taught to selected aspirants. And to-day, as then, those taught in the Gion-Shinchi are reputed to be the most superior geisha in the empire. It is the students of the Gion-Shinchi that the Japanese Follies, known locally as the Miyako-odori, are given every year throughout the month of April.

Because it is a celebration of the cherry season the Miyako-odori is known to most foreigners as the "cherry dance," although the name really means "dance of the residence of the Mikado" or "dance of the capital." Kyoto was formerly the capital of the empire, and, according to Kyoto boosters, is still spiritually so, for does not the coronation take place in the ancient palace at Kyoto? Is not Kyoto the recognized artistic and literary center of the country? Are not most of the traditions of the empire centered in the beautiful hills around Kyoto rather than in the mud flats upon which Yeddo, now known as Tokio, was built a recent years? And are not the Mikados brought back to Momo-yama in the hills near Kyoto for their last long rest? The palace at Tokio? Pooh! A mere business office. Kyoto is the heart of ancient Japan. Or so they say in Kyoto.

And it is in Kyoto that the Miyako-odori

takes place every year, to the great delectation of those who come from all over Japan to see it. The country yokels and the sophisticated folk from Tokio agree in their appreciation of the Miyako-odori. Throughout every afternoon and evening in April a sort of continuous performance takes place, each program lasting a little over an hour. It is always in the same place and always under the direction of Inouye Haruko, now a sprightly little old lady of eighty years. According to the old-time first nighters, this year's dance is much better than those of the last few seasons. Haruko, it seems, because of her advanced age, had been lately allowing the actual instruction of the dance steps and postures to be given by some of her assistants, contenting herself with a general supervision. This year, however, the Prince of Wales was to be in town, and a special performance of the Miyako-odori was to be given for him, so Haruko herself gave all the dancing lessons.

And the old first nighters throw up their hands in delight and declare the difference to be remarkable.

The imitators of the Miyako-odori are many and clever. Managers print elaborate explanations on their programs that they are not imitations—that, to the contrary, their first performances far antedate that of the Miyako-odori, which, as a matter of fact, is only a rank imitation of their own superior entertainments. But nobody is fooled. Perhaps a few unwary tourists who reach Kyoto after the first of May allow themselves to be persuaded that the dance they see is just as good as the "cherry dance." But no one else believes it. And if the other theaters are crowded after the first of May it is only because the Miyako-odori is finished and because the Japanese people like dancing girls. Other dances come and go—the public tastes in drama and entertainment change, but always in April Kyoto sees the Miyako-odori drawing crowds, the queues outside the ticket window standing patiently, and when the



The orchestra and some of the dancers in the Japanese Follies. In the oval, Inouye Haruko, a sprightly old lady of eighty, who teaches the girls their steps.

doors are opened the third class ticket holders rushing into their allotted spaces with a never changing eagerness to get the best six inches of floor matting, where they sit with their feet curled under them in tireless admiration of the shifting panorama. The Miyako-odori has taken its place in the guide books. It has become a custom, and once a thing has become a custom in Japan it is not long before it takes its place among the sacred things demanding and receiving its proper veneration.

On the night of the last performance of this year disappointed crowds were turned away. Those who managed to gain entrance responded to the program with an enthusiasm which would have delighted the hearts of New York's most popular chorus. The Tired Business Men who sat on the cushions three rows ahead of me were as delighted as all proper Tired Business Men should be. They drew excellent cigarettes from their kimono sleeves. They nodded their heads enthusiastically when they liked a dance. They pointed out their

favorite dancers, with their folding fans, and argued excitedly over their comparative charms. Between the third and fourth dances they called an usher, sent a note back stage and soon a most attractive little geisha joined them. She slipped matter of factly into an indescribably small space between two of them, and from then on the evening's entertainment proceeded in the usual manner prescribed for Tired Business Men the world over.

I have no way of judging this year's dance as compared to earlier ones. I only know this one was an exquisite panorama of rapidly and cleverly shifted scenery and a stageful of dainty kimono. It was so quickly over that the audience had scarcely gasped out its joy at the evanescent beauty of the thing before it had ended and had become a memory of an hour of beautiful color and delicate grace.

I kept thinking of New York revues I had

## —And West Is West.

seen and of how entrancingly little old Inouye Haruko out-Follies Mr. Ziegfeld. In the last scene there was a back drop of cherry blossoms lowered with electric sparklers glistening through it. The stage was full of bewitching little blue-clad dancers bearing cherry branches and Japanese fans. There were beautiful colors, splendid lighting effects, graceful movements—everything that a revue should have, excepting, of course, the legs. I remembered stages I had seen draped with flower ladders up which climbed peaches-and-cream maidens of Ziegfeldian proportions and adornment. No, the Miyako-odori would not succeed in New York. It is a series of postures, graceful and studied in detail, the subject usually having its origin in some popular literary or artistic motif or in stories of some of Japan's famous beauty spots.

And they are postures which would please the most puritanically inclined. Even when the geisha dance is seen in its own environment, restaurants or private parties, if the dancers remain true to Japanese traditions rather than affecting those of the traveling Yankee salesmen whom they may be entertaining, the poses are never suggestive of immodesty. The story the dance is depicting may be, and probably is, one which the Comstockians would wholeheartedly damn, but the gestures used by the maidens to tell the story are entirely restrained and classic.

So Mr. Ziegfeld's audiences would probably be bored by the Miyako-odori. There are no bare backs and no muscular gyrations. The most abandoned gesture of the cherry dancer is, perhaps, a sweeping bend to the floor to pick up a spray of the blossom, or a slow turn on her stocking heel, with the other foot uplifted a bare six inches from the floor and tucked well into the graceful swirl of her kimono. She does not climb boydenishly into a swing of rose ropes and, amid an alluring and provocative froth of laces from which extend two silken-clad legs entirely too realistic to be even provocative, swing far out over a delighted first row of bald heads. The cherry dancer is clad in a delicately tinted kimono which comes up into a demure little V exposure at her neck and surrounds her feet in a sweeping circle of color. There are no seductive curves at her waist, for it is encircled many times by a heavy brocade sash fashioned into an intricate bow almost as big as she is across her back. Her shining black hair is full of tortoise-shell pins. The stage is massed full of these beautiful creatures, and you, if you happen to be a foreigner, sigh contentedly, for there before you is the Japan of your childish dreams—the Japan you've been looking for ever since you came—the Japan of the picture books—the Japan of the little maidens on your tea cups—the Japan of your heart which has no place in it for stock exchanges and chambers of commerce.

It is there, your Japan, even if you do not find it nowadays in many other places.

## GOTHAM ARABIAN NIGHTS

Tale of the Good Caliph, the Sheik ul Islam and the Renunciation Sweepstakes.

By FREDERIC F. VAN de WATER

Illustration by Jefferson Machamer

GREAT, O, effendis all, was the chivalry and the courtesy displayed by the mighty Saladin and the gairous emir Richard of the Lion Heart, one to the other. Greater still the tenderness and consideration shown by the Sultan Sharrkhan of Damascus to his half-brother Nour-ed-Din. Yet these pale as does the hair of the average man when contrasted with the flowing locks of the good Caliph Hy-lan of the Ruddy Countenance, when one matches them with the greatness of heart and thought for each other displayed by this same Caliph—may Allah send him a thousand grandsons!—and Willi ibn Hearst, the Sheik ul Islam.

Wherefore, draw near, emirs, pashas, beys and the holy hadji who wear the sacred green turban of the pilgrimage and give ear to the thousand and fifty-seventh tale of the good Caliph and how he and the noble sheik engaged in a duel of nobility known as the Renunciation Sweepstakes.

Now it came to pass in the fifth year of the Profit that the good Caliph sate in his council chamber, listening to the cooling drip of the shower on the floor below and reading a tome on the care and feeding of the young of Islam by the Wazir Holt. And a Mameluke of the guard entered, and salaaming before his lord, spake, saying:

"O, constituency of Willi ibn Hearst, behold the soothsayer is without and he saith he hath a vision to disclose to thee, nor will he be put off, but demandeth audience at once."

Whereat the good Caliph blinked thrice and spake, saying: "Usher him into the presence forthwith. Perchance he hath some charm for the exorcising of colic from the young or a potion that will enable them and the rest of the house to gain a night of unbroken slumber."

And it was as the good Caliph commanded, and the soothsayer entered and, after making obeisance, cried in a hollow voice:

"A doom, O, great Caliph, a doom! Caliph thou art; Sultan thou wilt endeavor to be. Beware the ides of November!"

Then answered the Caliph with dignity: "Whazzat?"

And the soothsayer gave answer: "Great phoenix of this realm, I have knowledge past the understanding of man. I speak with djinns and afrites, and the seven gates of Eblis are open to me. And behold it hath come to mine ears that thou wilt take the place of Willi ibn Hearst in the vanguard of the faithful and go forth to war against the Sultan Nathan the Curious and strive to overthrow him. Wherefore, I bid thee, beware!"

Then smiled the good Caliph as the sun breaketh through clouds after the rain, and he

spake saying: "Now by the beard of the Prophet, if this be true, well shalt thou be rewarded, but where dost thou acquire that beware stuff?"

And the soothsayer gave answer, saying: "Mighty lord, beware the poison wells of Al Bany. Dost thou remember the Sheik Meyer and the sword-tongued El Brown Effendi? Dost thou remember the Charter Revision hosts and the hordes of the Transit Commission?"

Then replied the Caliph: "Aye. I have been



"A doom, O great Caliph, a doom! Caliph thou art; Sultan thou wilt endeavor to be. Beware the ides of November!"

—this is a little jest of mine own—Meyer and Undermeyer!"

Then spake the soothsayer quickly as one who hath little joy in original jest: "Consider whence they came. From the wells of Al Bany to war against thy greatness. Consider, O, Caliph, how many more who cannot afford the carfare wait there until thou comest to them to plague thee. And behold in all the land of Al Bany there is none to write thy speeches for thee, unless they remove 'The American' from this city thither. Recant, O, Caliph; I warn thee while there is still time. Beware of thirst for power! Beware!"

And he vanished, leaving smoke and flame behind him. Then spake the Caliph, thinking rapidly, and at the end of an hour and forty minutes he summoned his scribe, saying: "Write thou an epistle from me to Willi ibn Hearst, the great sheik."

Now, at the same day and hour came Conners Bey, great and good friend to Willi ibn Hearst, to the palace of his lord and sought the presence of the Sheik ul Islam, saying: "Woe is me, great prophet and prince, for my efforts have come to naught. Long have I striven in thy behalf. Much have I spent and many the words in thy praise I have poured into the ears of those who came to me from the kept press. Yet, alas, none have I converted to thy banner, and I fear that defeat will greet thee when thou goest forth to war against the Sultan Nathan. We barely hold our own and gain no recruits. Aye, even our constituency, the good Caliph, wavereth in his allegiance, and rumor hath it is about to come out for Hy-lan."

"Behold even this day came one to our headquarters crying joyfully that he would give any amount to see thee sultan. And I greeted him with joy, but found that he labored under the belief that it was Albania, rather than Al Bany over which thou desirest to rule, and when I had made all plain to him he went away sorrowing and gave naught to thy cause."

Then spake Willi ibn Hearst: "Art thou cer-

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